

Preparing a Family Care Plan

Overview

Explains the Family Care Plan, why it's important, what it covers, and where to start.

- What is a Family Care Plan?
- The basic requirements
- Additional issues to address
- Finding help and advice
- Other concerns
- Other resources

If you were suddenly deployed, who would provide care for your children -- or for an older relative who depends on you for care? Even if you were only away for a short time, on temporary duty or training, who would take over for you? Nearly everyone in the military can benefit from a Family Care Plan that shows how your family is to be cared for in your absence, and in some cases you are required to create one. DoDI (Department of Defense Instruction) 1342.19 addresses when a Family Care Plan is required, and each service branch has a corresponding directive that explains that service branch's guidelines.

Your commander or supervisor can tell you the resources that are available to help you create a Family Care Plan that meets your service branch's specific requirements. These resources include your installation's Family Support Center and Legal Assistance Office. The information below can help you understand the basics before you begin.

What is a Family Care Plan?

A Family Care Plan is a "blueprint" that shows how your family will be cared for in your absence -- whether you are deployed, on temporary duty, or otherwise unavailable because of military obligations. It allows for a smooth transition of responsibilities to a caregiver when a service member must leave for short or long periods of time, demonstrating to the commander that unit members will be ready to accomplish the mission of the unit. The plan is made up of instructions that you write and certain legal documents, such as a power-of-attorney.

Who needs one?

Certain service members are required to have a Family Care Plan. These people include:

- A single parent with custody of children under 19 years of age.
- A single service member who is pregnant.
- Dual military couples with custody of children under 19 years of age. (Both service members are required to develop a single Family Care Plan that both members sign.)

- A service member who is solely responsible for the care (housing, medical, logistical, financial, food, clothing, or transportation) of another person. This category includes (but isn't limited to) a situation where a service member's spouse is injured, chronically sick, or otherwise unable to care for family members or other dependents; and service members who are sole caregivers for elderly, disabled, or chronically sick family members.

Completion of a Family Care Plan may also be required if a service member has a family member who speaks little or no English or is unable to drive or otherwise gain access to basic resources such as medical care and food. A service member with an Exceptional Family Member (regardless of age) may also be required to complete a Family Care Plan.

It can even be a good idea for civilian spouses married to service members to have a Family Care Plan. This is because if the service member is deployed and the spouse becomes incapacitated, plans will be in effect for the proper care of their children.

When should you make one?

A service member should notify his or her supervisor or commander about creating a Family Care Plan as soon as the service member enters any of the categories described above.

The basic requirements

The requirements for a Family Care Plan may vary somewhat depending on your service branch or your particular circumstances. But they all contain the following basic information:

- *Short-term care plans.* These plans outline how your family members will be cared for during separations lasting 30 or fewer days (in the Air Force, the requirement is usually 45 days or less). Your short-term care plans could take effect for reasons such as temporary duty, training, school, or short-term involuntary recalls. The care provider must be a non-military person and must live in the local area. The care provider must also sign the Family Care Plan.
- *Long-term care plans.* These plans give details on who will care for your family members during separations lasting 31 days or more (in the Air Force, the requirement is usually more than 45 days). Your long-term care plans might become necessary during deployments or times of extended training or involuntary recalls. The care provider must be nonmilitary, but does not have to live in the local area. However, plans should be in place for transporting family members from a short-term care provider to a long-term care provider in the case of deployment (or other separation) with little or no notice. The long-term care provider must also sign the Family Care Plan.

- *Care provider designations and documentation.* Your plan must name the care provider and provide documentation and information necessary to allow the care provider to care for your children (or other family members) adequately -- and to possibly run your household. Be sure to note that any care provider that you select must be legally entitled to act in that capacity. Thus, if your biological children reside with you and your new spouse (who is a stepparent), the other biological parent must either be designated as the care provider (if that person has custodial rights) or must consent in writing to the designation of another person.

The documentation states that the person you selected to provide care has fully agreed to the task and has been provided with all legal authority to do so (including medical or other power of attorney). This documentation should also describe financial concerns and explain procedures for obtaining access to both military and civilian facilities and services necessary to properly care for your family -- for example, health care needs.

Additional issues to address

Aside from basic care provider information and necessary legal forms, your Family Care Plan should also include specific instructions on arrangements for child care, school, medical care, and family activities. By detailing your routines and giving your care provider as much information as possible, you can better avoid problems and allow your children (or other dependants) the security of knowing things will remain as constant as possible.

- *Outline arrangements for daily activities.* Make certain your care provider clearly understands your family's daily routines. It's a good idea to create a calendar of the week's events -- noting the starting and ending times of the school day, any after-school activities, bed times, and any special events.
- *Give details on legal, logistical, educational, religious, and other concerns for family care.* Let your care provider know as much as possible how your family life "works." Write down specific details on the logistics of housing, food, and transportation. If it is important to you that your family members attend weekly religious services, let the caregiver know this so she can accommodate. It is wise to also leave the school's (or place of worship's) calendar handy, so the care provider knows of important upcoming events, as well.
- *Provide medical information.* Does your daughter suffer from asthma and regularly need an inhaler? Does your son take daily medication? It is important to write down detailed information about family physicians, medications and vitamins, hospitals, and regular appointments, so your family's medical needs will be properly addressed.
- *Provide locations of important documents,* such as wills, insurance papers, and birth certificates.

- *Establish relocation plans.* If it becomes necessary for your family to move from one area to another, the logistics for this move should be pointed out in the Family Care Plan. Such a move might be necessary if your short-term assignment became a long-term one, for example. Be sure to note details such as finances, airline tickets, and transportation to and from airports.
- *Make sure that ID cards are current.* Check to make certain that your family members' ID cards have not expired, and be sure your dependents are registered in DEERS (the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System). Keep in mind that care providers should have access to the installation exchange, commissary, and any necessary medical facilities, as well.
- *Provide lists of close contacts and other resources.* Be sure to provide the following personal information to your caregiver:
 - names, addresses, and telephone numbers of relatives, neighbors, and friends
 - names and telephone numbers of doctors and dentists
 - lists of military and community resources with points of contact and telephone numbers
 - an information sheet with the names and addresses of the military unit, commander or commanding officer, first sergeant or commanding chief, command enlisted supervisor, supervisor, and family readiness program point of contact
- *Designate a person to have temporary responsibility for your children in the event of your incapacity or death.* A will is the document that describes, among other things, who will have permanent custody of your children in the event of your death. However, you also need to establish who will have temporary responsibility for your dependents in such circumstances. Will this be the same individual as your caregiver? Whether it is or not, you should make note of it in your Family Care Plan.

Finding help and advice

The following resources can provide you with information as you create your Family Care Plan:

- *Supervisors.* Either your commander or supervisor is responsible for making sure that you have a current, workable Family Care Plan. The commander may designate a representative from the command to handle Family Care Plan issues. This means that the commander or a command representative can be your first resource for more information on the plan itself, what it should include, any particular requirements relating to your specific situation, and other people and services you can consult for help.
- *Installation Family Support Centers.* Next to your supervisor, your installation's Family Support Center (depending on your service branch, your Navy Fleet and

Family Support Center, Marine Corps Community Service, Air Force Family Support Center, or Army Community and Family Support Center) could be your most important resource in creating your Family Care Plan. These centers have counselors who are experienced in the creation of Family Care Plans and can help you understand the issues involved. In addition, these centers often have brochures or classes related to developing Family Care Plans.

- *Legal Assistance Offices.* Your installation's Legal Assistance Office can help you regarding any legal documents needed in your Family Care Plan. Professionals there can help you understand, for example, the general, limited, and medical power-of-attorney documents -- and can help you select the right ones for your particular needs. They can also help you create a will. In many instances, they will have all of the particular forms your service branch requires for a Family Care Plan.
- *Other helpful resources.* Military libraries, installation social service agencies, and religious advisers can also be helpful resources to consult when preparing your Family Care Plan. You might also want to speak with other service members who have Family Care Plans or have had them in the past.

Other concerns

Try to keep in mind that the sole purpose of a Family Care Plan is to secure your family's well-being in the event of your absence. The time and energy you spend on putting it together now is time well spent. Here are some other points to keep in mind:

- *Commander review and approval.* It is your commander's responsibility to not only counsel you on your Family Care Plan, but also to approve or disapprove it, verify that your care provider agrees to his or her duties, and review your annual updates to the plan. The commander or a designated command representative should test the viability of the plan and make certain that it is complete in terms of forms, instructions, and listed contact information.
- *Deadlines.* An active duty service member has 30 days (from the date of change in family situation) to alert his or her supervisor of the need to create a Family Care Plan. After that date, the service member has 60 days to submit an acceptable Plan. If a commander or supervisor approves it, a 30-day extension may be granted (beyond the 60 days) -- when circumstances warrant an extension.
- *Updating your Family Care Plan.* At least once a year you should reevaluate your Family Care Plan. Circumstances sometimes change. For example, the appointed care provider may no longer be capable of caring for your family. By revisiting your Family Care Plan each year, you can address new issues in your life and those of your family members.

- *Penalties.* Service members who are required to complete and update Family Care Plans but fail to do so are considered nondeployable. They can also be subject to disciplinary action or involuntarily separation from the service.

Other resources

Your installation's support services

Depending on your service branch, your Fleet and Family Support Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Airman and Family Readiness Center, or Army Community Service Center can provide you with information and support.

Military OneSource

This free 24-hour service, provided by the Department of Defense, is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues. You can reach the program by telephone at 1-800-342-9647 or through the Web site at www.militaryonesource.com.

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